

# An ethical portrait of a palliative and long-term care nurse

## ( Etyczny portret pielęgniarki pracującej w opiece paliatywnej i długoterminowej )

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**Abstract** – Introduction. Nursing is art, science and, above all, service. One of the most important expressions of humanism. It requires mastering specific knowledge and appropriate skills. Nurturing aims to help people to live better and maintain their health, and when they are ill, they should contribute to the healing process as soon as possible. All these activities should be carried out in compliance with ethical principles. The high topicality of the subject matter prompted me to undertake my own research.

**Aim of the study.** The aim of the research was to create an ethical portrait of a nurse working in palliative and long-term care.

**Materials and methods.** The study included 101 nurses working in randomly selected palliative and/or long-term and/or hospice care facilities in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship. In the study, the method of a diagnostic survey, a questionnaire technique and, as a research tool, an author's questionnaire were used.

**Results and Conclusions.** The research reveals an ethical portrait of a contemporary professional nurse working in palliative and long-term care:

1. It's a person for whom truth, goodness and fairness are the leading factors in his or her professional career.
2. These values are also the most important in their non-professional lives.
3. A nurse shall strive to observe ethical principles in all professional circumstances.
4. At the same time, she is a tolerant person who accepts the different views of others. the strongest motivators for ethical professional conduct are human misfortune and the need to do good.

**Key words** - ethics, palliative and long-term care, nurses, surveys.

**Streszczenie** – Wprowadzenie. Pielęgniarstwo jest sztuką, nauką, a przede wszystkim służbą. Jednym z najważniejszych wyrazów ludzkiego humanizmu. Wymaga opanowania określonej wiedzy i odpowiednich umiejętności. Pielęgnowanie ma na celu pomaganie człowiekowi, żeby mógł lepiej żyć i zachować zdrowie, a gdy choruje, powinno przyczynić się do tego, aby

proces zdrowienia przebiegał jak najszybciej. Wszystkie te działania mają przebiegać z zachowaniem i przestrzeganiem zasad etycznych. Duża aktualność tematyki skłoniła mnie do podjęcia badań własnych.

**Cel pracy.** Celem badań było stworzenie etycznego portretu pielęgniarki pracującej w opiece paliatywnej i długoterminowej.

**Materiały i metody.** Badaniem objęto 101 pielęgniarek i pielęgniarzy, pracujących w losowo wybranych zakładach opieki paliatywnej i/lub długoterminowej i/lub hospicyjnej województwa mazowieckiego. W badaniu zastosowano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego, technikę ankiety, a jako narzędzie badawcze - autorski kwestionariusz ankiety.

**Wyniki i Wnioski.**

Z przeprowadzonych badań wyłania się portret etyczny współczesnej pielęgniarki pracującej zawodowo w opiece paliatywnej i długoterminowej:

1. Jest to osoba, dla której wiodącymi w pracy zawodowej jest *prawda, dobro i sprawiedliwość*.
2. Wartości te są również najważniejsze w jej życiu pozazawodowym.
3. Pielęgniarka dąży do przestrzegania zasad etycznych w każdych okolicznościach zawodowych.
4. Jest jednocześnie osobą tolerancyjną, akceptującą odmienne poglądy innych. Najsilniejszymi motywatorami do etycznego postępowania zawodowego jest *ludzkie nieszczęście oraz potrzeba czynienia dobra*.

**Słowa kluczowe** – etyka, opieka paliatywna i długoterminowa, pielęgniarka, badania ankietowe.

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- A. The idea and the planning of the study
- B. Gathering and listing data
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## I. INTRODUCTION

The attitudes of the medical personnel, including nurses towards the patient, are regulated by a number of principles, including the principles of law and bioethics. The bioethical rules refer to the regulations concerning the professions specified in the Act of 15 July 2011 on the professions of nurse and midwife. Article 36 of the Act indicates professional liability for violation of the rules of professional ethics or regulations concerning the profession. Palliative medicine often takes on a specific character of activities, which, however, must always be based on bioethical foundations. 1-5] The high topicality of the subject matter prompted the authors to undertake their own research. The aim of the research was to create an ethical portrait of a nurse working in palliative and long-term care.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Material

The study comprised 101 nurses (92 women and 9 men) aged 20-62 years, working in randomly selected palliative care facilities and/or long-term and/or hospice care facilities in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship.

### Methodology

In the study, the method of a diagnostic survey, the technique of a questionnaire, and as a research tool - an author's

questionnaire was used. Participation in the research was random, voluntary and anonymous. The research was conducted in the period from 1 July to 30 September 2018.

### Statistical analysis

Statistica 13.1 was used for statistical analysis. Basic descriptive statistics were analysed with the help of the program. Correlation of tau -c Kendall, tau-b Kendall, tau-b Kendall, r-Person was used to assess the relationships between the variables. The statistically significant level was  $p < 0.05$ .

## III. RESULTS

Distribution of answers characteristic for particular questions of the survey

Question : What values do you follow in your professional career? (5 values can be indicated) Among the given ethical values, the respondents were supposed to indicate what values they follow in their professional career? Each of the respondents had to choose 5 answers.

63.4% of respondents considered good to be the main value they follow in their professional work, 46.5% - health, 40.6% - safety. A detailed distribution of answers is presented in Table 1.

The statistical analysis shows that respondents often chose truth, goodness and justice interchangeably. The statistical significance was calculated on the basis of the correlation of tau -c Kendall and amounted to 0.092.

Question : Are you guided by the same values in your personal life? Each respondent answering "no" was supposed to indicate a few values that he or she is guided by in his or her personal life.

93.1% of respondents said that in their personal lives they follow the same values as they do in their professional lives, 7% are guided by different values. The detailed distribution of responses is shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Distribution of answers to the question: *What values do you use in your professional career?*

Answers	Number of respondents	%*
affection	24	23,8
health	47	46,5
belief	14	13,9
wisdom	56	55,4
study	36	35,6
occupation	26	25,7
richness	0	0
happiness	8	7,9
truth	451/	44,6
good	642/	63,4
tolerability	35	34,7
fairness	543/	53,5
pastime	0	0
imagination	8	7,9
loyalty	27	26,7
mood	1	1
security	41	40,6
monies	4	4
dreams	1	1
education	10	9,9
liberty	0	0
recreation	0	0
friendship	4	4

\* percentage calculated from the number of all respondents.

„1/” do „2”  $p < 0,01$

„2” do „3/”  $p < 0,01$

Table 2. Distribution of answers to the question: *Do you follow the same values in your personal life?*

Answers	Number of respondents	%
Yes	94 <sup>1/</sup>	93,1
No	7 <sup>2/</sup>	6,9

The statistical analysis shows that respondents were often statistically significantly guided by the same values in their professional work as in their non-working lives.

*Question:* Do you always follow the rules you follow at work?

Each of the respondents had to choose one of the three answers.

82.2% of the respondents observe the rules they profess at work, 12.9% replied that they do not observe their moral principles, 5% did not have an opinion. A detailed breakdown of responses is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of answers to the question: *Do you always observe the rules you follow at work?*

Answers	Number of respondents	%
Yes	831 <sup>1/</sup>	82,2
No	132 <sup>2/</sup>	12,9
I don't know	5	5

„1/” do „2/”  $p > 0,01$

The statistical analysis does not show that the respondents always observe the rules they follow in their professional work. Statistical significance was calculated on the basis of Kendall's tau-b correlation and amounts to 0.362.

*Question :* Do you allow other people's values and beliefs to run counter to your beliefs?

Each of the respondents was asked to indicate one answer.

92.1% of those surveyed replied that they allow other values to be held by others which do not conform to their beliefs, 7.9% that they do not allow other views to exist which do not conform to their views. The detailed distribution of responses is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of answers to the question: *Do you allow values and views of other people that do not conform to your beliefs to exist?*

Answers	Number of respondents	%
Yes	931/	92,1
No	82/	7,9

„1/” do „2/”  $p < 0,01$

The statistical analysis shows that respondents statistically significantly often allowed for the existence of values and views held by other people who did not conform to their own beliefs.

*Question:* How often do you comply with the standards and ethical principles of the medical facility in which you work?

Each of the respondents was asked to choose one answer.

52.5% of those interviewed replied that they often follow the ethical principles of their medical facilities, 46.5% - always, 1% - sometimes. The detailed distribution of responses is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of answers to the question: *How often do you comply with the standards and ethics of the medical facility in which you work?*

Answers	Number of respondents	%
Always	471/	46,5
Often	532/	52,5
Sometimes	1	1
Rarely	0	0
Never	0	0

„1/” do „2/”  $p > 0,01$

The statistical analysis shows that the respondents statistically significantly obeyed the ethical rules of medical fingers. Statistical significance was calculated on the basis of Kendall's tau-b correlation and amounted to 0.362.

*Question:* What motivates you most to act in accordance with your professional ethical conscience?

Each of the respondents could choose any number of answers.

72.3% of those surveyed indicated human misfortune as the greatest motivation to act according to their conscience, 62.4% - their own strong decision to do good, 41.6% - beliefs taken from their family home. The detailed distribution of answers is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Distribution of answers to the question: *What motivates you the most to act in accordance with your professional ethical conscience?*

Answers	Number of respondents	%
Human misery	731/ <sup>1</sup>	72,3
Legal liability	37	36,6
Fear of God	13	12,9
Your own strong resolve to do good	632/ <sup>2</sup>	62,4
Long-term working time	31	30,7
Beliefs gained from the family home	42	41,6
Educational background	35	34,7
Views and actions of colleagues	3	3
The willingness to protest against general evil and ethical decline	12	11,9
Integrity	1	1

„1/” do „2/”  $p < 0,01$

The statistical analysis shows that respondents often statistically motivate people to act in accordance with their own ethical conscience, human misfortune and their own strong deeds. Statistical significance in this study was calculated on the basis of Kendall's tau-b correlation and amounted to 0.004.

#### *An overview of ethical considerations in palliative care and long-term care activities*

In the further part of the study, on the basis of the responses, which were given statistically, an image of ethical premises for a nurse providing palliative and long-term care for patients was often built.

Table 7. An overview of ethical considerations in palliative care and long-term care provision

Ethical elements of actions	Ethical premises followed by a nurse in her professional career
values that dominate in professional work	truth, goodness and justice
values that dominate in non-professional activities	the same values as those observed in the profession
observance of ethical principles which are professed in professional work	whenever
tolerance towards opinions, including ethical ones, of others	always observed
the strongest motivators act according to their own ethical views	human misfortune and the need to do good

The research reveals an ethical portrait of a contemporary professional nurse working in palliative and long term care. This is a person for whom truth, goodness and fairness are the leading factors in his or her professional career. These values are also the most important in her non-professional life. A nurse strives to respect ethical principles in all professional circumstances. At the same time, she is a tolerant person who accepts the different views of others. The strongest motivators for ethical professional conduct are human misfortune and the need to do good.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

*"You're the only one who matters, because you're yourself.  
You count until the last moment of your life.  
And we will do everything in our power,  
to help you not only die in peace,  
but to live until death."*

C. Sanders

In the literature on the subject, ethical principles are often explained as a set of more or less conscious and logically ordered moral beliefs guiding human behaviour [6].

In turn, by ethical principles Wrońska understands [...] certain internal fixed suggestions that may serve man in directing his conduct. Put simply, ethical principles are a kind of signposting which help man to make morally correct choices both in his professional and personal life [7].

The establishment of hospice and palliative care in Poland was the response of health care workers and volunteers to the epidemiological, demographic and social needs of patients who did not receive professional care and analgesic treatment.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, hospice care in Poland has functioned as part of a selfless, charitable activity with a great involvement and participation of nurses. In 1999, palliative care was recognized by the Ministry of Health as a separate medical and nursing specialization. The terms palliative and hospice care are used unequivocally in accordance with WHO recommendations, while respecting their differences and traditions [8].

Cicely Saunders - an English nurse, social worker and doctor, pioneer of the modern hospice movement, in reference to medieval traditions, initiated a full concept of care for incurably ill patients, focused on a holistic view of the human being (his/her mental, physical, spiritual and social sphere), control of symptoms and accompanying the patient during dying [9].

Ethical norms are the determinant of ethical patterns of behaviour in a given community. In the social vision, the nurse's conscience is endowed with special trust, which plays an important role in shaping ethical professional attitudes. Ethical conscience, which allows to make appropriate morally acceptable decisions. [10,11]

According to Korczak, particularly important ethical principles in the practice of nursing should be included: In Korczak's opinion, particularly important ethical principles in nursing practice include: goodness, independence, justice, truthfulness, ethics of care. These are the principles governing everyday practice of working with patients [12].

Our own research shows that important principles include truth told to patients, justice, goodness, wisdom and health.

According to the research conducted by the Institute of Public Health of the Higher Vocational School in Nowy Sącz, it can be observed that in the group of 30 nurses, the following ethical values are valued while performing tasks resulting from the performance of nursing services: respect for others and human life, responsibility, selflessness, honesty, doing good and harmless, confidentiality and truthfulness [13].

According to Koństańczak, who analyzes the contemporary world and society, in the era of rapid progress and socio-political changes, it is important to bring man closer to man in the spirit of friendship and mutual respect - so much needed in relations between a nurse and a patient. The crisis of values, which we observe in the Polish society, should not, however, concern nurses, especially those providing direct care for the patient who is in danger of life threatening state and the patient with whom there is no direct contact [14].

Ethical principles binding in the work of a nurse are therefore very important, on which depends to the greatest extent how the patient will be taken out of the disease condition. Nursing is concerned with the most valuable human good - health. Therefore, in order to carry it out, it is not enough to be professionally prepared to acquire knowledge and skills, but it is necessary to develop moral principles and a strong will in order to be able to put these principles into practice [15-17].

Nursing care is the provision of care to all those who are unable to care for their own health and life.

Our own research shows that goodness, wisdom and justice are important ethical values in the profession of nurse indicated by the respondent. These are the three most frequently indicated answers. Similar results are presented by Gawel [18]. The findings of the above-mentioned author show that the most important are ethical values in the profession of nurse (indications of 100% of respondents), respect for life and the other person (indications of 90% of respondents), doing good and not harming (indications of 90% of respondents) and justice (indications of 83% of respondents).

Korczak [12] in his reflection on the code of professional ethics emphasizes that everyone who is a nurse should make full use of their knowledge, constantly expand it, constantly improve their practical skills while observing moral principles.

In the profession of a nurse, the most important thing is to build and nurture ethical attitudes. The Code of Professional Ethics makes it a duty to have an impeccable ethical attitude and to observe and act in accordance with moral values consistent with the mission which is to provide assistance and care.

Therefore, it can be considered that knowledge is an extremely important element and as an ethical value should constitute a source of knowledge of practical work with the patient at the basis of nursing. [10,17]

## V. CONCLUSION

The research reveals an ethical portrait of a contemporary professional nurse working in palliative and long-term care:

- It's a person for whom truth, goodness and fairness are the leading factors in his or her professional career.
- These values are also the most important in their non-professional lives.
- A nurse shall strive to observe ethical principles in all professional circumstances.
- At the same time, she is a tolerant person who accepts the different views of others. The strongest motivators for ethical professional conduct are human misfortune and the need to do good.

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